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## Causes behind Differential Performance in Various Types of BRAC Schools

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# **Causes behind Differential Performance in Various Types of BRAC Schools**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Differential learning achievement of the graduates of three types of BRAC schools viz., BRAC primary school, BRAC community school and BRAC formal school came out through a recent study with some hypothetical explanation of the reasons behind such difference. This study aims to fill this gap through an in-depth and qualitative exploration. Observation, in-depth interview and focus group discussion were the techniques applied using various checklists. Although the aim and objectives of all three types of schools were similar to those of the national level, the formal school students had better home background, qualified teachers, longer contact hour, use of full range of government prepared textbooks, and other enabling conditions in the schools, thus they had better performance compared to the other two types of school. In terms of value addition, the BPS model has contributed more than others with their limited wealth.

## INTRODUCTION

Quality of education is a major concern in any education provision. The analysts of quality of education proposed various frameworks in order to understand it. Each framework incorporates a number of indicators or factors those collectively help understanding of quality of education (UNESCO 2005, Mayer *et al.* 2000, Chowdhury *et al.* 1997, Nath 2006). The place of learning achievement of the students is a significant one in all of them. However, process of educational attainment has never been forgotten in formulating the frameworks.

In Bangladesh, we are concerned about quality of education. Our experience, at the national level shows that we could not do much in the area of quality of education as much as we could do in increasing school participation of the children or achieving gender parity in participation (Chowdhury *et al.* 2002, Nath and Chowdhury 2001). Competency-based education provision has been introduced in Bangladesh as part of the struggle for quality education. It is expected that the students would be able to achieve the full range of competencies (50 in number) throughout their education in primary schools. (NCTB and UNICEF 1988)

BRAC is a significant provider of primary education in the country. About 6-7% of the primary school students enrolled in BRAC schools (Chowdhury *et al.* 2002). It has three types of schools. These are BRAC primary school (BPS), BRAC community schools (BCS), and BRAC formal primary schools (BFPS). According to size of the programme, BPS is the largest one followed by respectively BCS and BFPS. BPS provides education through non-formal fashion and the other two follows formal way. A brief description of these schools is provided in Box 1. It shows that the provisions are not similar; they differ in many ways of operation. They are similar in their aim – to provide quality education in line of the aims and objectives of primary education in the country.

Like any other school programme, students' learning achievement is the major concern in BRAC education programme. The current phase of BRAC education programme also emphasised on this along with more studies and research on various quality issues. In line with this, a review exercise of the existing studies was done, research-gaps identified and a fresh research plan developed (Nath 2006, BEP and RED 2006).

Competency-based learning achievement test of BRAC school graduates is carried out each year at the end of the primary cycle. This test was developed by the Education Watch group in Bangladesh in 2000 to have a national status in this regard. Not all the three types of BRAC schools are brought under the assessment process. It is mainly concentrated only among the graduates of BPS. An exceptional situation occurred in 2004, where the graduates of three types of BRAC schools were brought under the assessment (Nath *et al.* 2005). In this study, for the first time, we saw that the students of all three types of BRAC schools did not achieve the primary competencies equally. The BRAC formal primary schools were at the top of the score card, the community schools at the middle and the BRAC primary schools at the bottom. The average performance of the later two types was close to each other, which had a distance with the first type. Some of the findings of this study are as follows.

- Of the 27 competencies tested, the graduates of BFPS on average achieved 21.2 competencies, community schools 19.2 and BRAC primary schools 18.9.
- Of the six areas (subjects) under the test, BFPS did best in most of them, community schools in mathematics and BPS in social studies in some measures.

- Gender difference was higher in BPS than that of others.
- Disabled students did less well than their peers.

**Box 1. A brief description of three types of BRAC schools**

BRAC primary school (BPS): These are single teacher school with one classroom popularly known as NFPE (non-formal primary education). A cohort of 33 students completes a full cycle of primary education of five academic years within four calendar years. BRAC prepared textbooks are used in the first three grades and NCTB prepared textbooks for the rest two years. Schools are arranged in rented houses. Education is totally free in these schools. BRAC provides free textbooks and stationeries to the students, monthly remuneration to the teachers and rent of schoolhouses. A total of 7,343 groups of students completed primary education from these schools in December 2004, 7,026 in rural areas.

BRAC community school (BCS): With financial assistance of the government the communities established these schools. In 1998, identifying them as non-functioning 44 such schools were handed over to BRAC. NCTB prepared textbooks are used in these schools and the students complete the full cycle of primary education within five calendar years. Each school has 4-5 teachers – salary paid by BRAC. These are mostly two-shift schools with three classrooms each. The average class size is below 40.

BRAC formal primary school (PFPS): These are non-registered primary schools established by BRAC. The schools are established in permanent structure. Each school has five classrooms and five teachers. The students use NCTB produced textbooks for five calendar years to complete the full cycle of primary education. BRAC provides teachers salary. The boys are to pay some money for educational materials but the girls don't. Number of schools of this type is only 11. The class size is 40 in these schools.

It is to be noted that the non-formal schools are temporarily established. After completion of a cycle if adequate number of out of school children (at least 30) is not available in the school location, the school is moved to a new area, which is generally a remote location. This means that the programme is entering in the remote areas over time. On the other hand, the other two types of schools are established in permanent locations. Management and supervision of the schools are also designed according to their nature. Again, the class size of the permanent schools is higher than the temporarily established schools. As the number of teachers is more than one in these schools, the teachers can share and cooperate with each other as and when necessary, which is not the case in the one teacher non-formal schools. In order to complete the full cycle of primary education the non-formal schools take four calendar years, whereas it is five years in other two cases.

Source: Nath *et al.* (2005). Achievement of competencies of the BRAC school students. Dhaka: RED, BRAC.

The above study although tried to explain the reasons behind differential performance of the students from the perspective of differential modes of operandi of the provisions, it lacked in-depth exploration through observations and interviewing at the ground. Thus, the present study attempts to explore the causes behind differential performance of the graduates of three types of BRAC schools.

## METHODS

The study was qualitative in nature. The 32 thousand BPS was spread all over the country, but the number of schools like community and formal were only 44 and 11 respectively. Attempt was taken to find out areas where all three types of schools were there. There were no areas where community and formal schools exist together. However, we found four regions where all three types of schools existed; two of which were randomly selected.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the study was concentrated on six schools, two from each type.

Eight groups of respondents with variety of experiences were selected from the central management to the field level. They include the head office level managers of the school programmes, regional managers, area managers, programme organizers, teachers, students, parents and common villagers. Besides, classroom teaching of the students of class V and refreshers training classes of the teachers were observed. A total of 113 informants (38 from BPS, 40 from BCS and 35 from BFPS) were brought under investigation, and six classrooms and two refreshers training were observed.

Three techniques viz., in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observations were utilised to collect information. Separate checklists were used for different groups of respondents. More than one technique was used for a number of sources. This helped in cross checking of information and ensured authenticity. The researchers themselves collected all information; no assistant was considered. The fieldwork was done in June 2006.

Strength of this study lies in collection of data by the researchers. For the first time we explored the reasons behind differential performance of the pupils. As the study was qualitative in nature it was not possible to consider a large sample. Thus, the study has some limitations regarding generalization of findings. However, the researchers tried their best to crosscheck all information before reporting.

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<sup>1</sup> In BRAC system, the schools are clustered in area offices. There are about 60-70 schools under each area office, which are looked after 5/6 programme organizers. A number of such area offices are clustered in regions (mostly equivalent to a district).

## FINDINGS

Information collected through our discussions and interviews with various stakeholders and observation of few issues helped us in understanding the causes behind differential performance of the students of three types of BRAC schools. We have categorised our findings according to certain key themes that has been argued to affect student performance in the literature.

### PUPILS' DIFFERENTIAL ECONOMIC CONDITION

National scale studies often shows positive links between households' economic strength and pupils learning achievement (Nath and Chowdhury 2001, Ahmed *et al.* 2003). But a recent study on BRAC BPS did not show such relationship (Nath *et al.* 2006). This is an interesting finding. However, we lack similar data to examine the trend in relationship over time. Qualitative investigation with various stakeholders, especially with the regional and area managers of BRAC education programme expressed similar opinion to that of the findings of the national scale studies. According to them, the pupils of well-off families were free from any household work. They were able to give more time and concentration to their study. On the other hand, poorer students needed to help their parents at home.

In respect to the specific question related to economic status of the students of three types of BRAC schools the area managers and the programme organizers mentioned that the students of BPS came from relatively poorer families compared to their counterparts in other two types of schools. The BPS students often helped their parents in household works. Some of the teachers said that due to their involvement at home some students sometimes remained absent from classes. They also added that some parents came to school at the mid of the school hour and took their children home or field for work. When the issue was discussed with the POs and the teachers of the community schools they said that their situation was not that much worse like as BPS. The economic condition of the parents of the community schools was slightly better than that of BPS. Children from both poor and middle class families enrolled in the community schools. On the other hand, most of the students of BFPS came from middle class families. The parents and the students of various types of schools echoed similar views when the issue was discussed with them in groups. The researchers visited some of the houses of the students of these schools and found no difference with the above opinions.

Let us remember what two of our students from two different types of schools said about economic condition of their households and their involvement in work.

Our teacher often provides us with home tasks, which I can not do always because my mother wants me to help her. If I fail to do home tasks, my teacher becomes angry and punishes me.

*- A student of class V in a BRAC Primary School*

Sometimes I wanted to do work at home. This is not only to help my parents but also for a change. But my mother does not allow me to help her. She thought if I involve in work it may be harmful for my study. I do not get any chance to do household work.

*- A student of class V in a BRAC Community School*

According to various stakeholders of BRAC education programme, students of the three types of BRAC schools were not homogeneous in respect to their households' economic strength. They also felt that there is a positive link between economic strength of the households and learning achievement of the students. Thus, the conclusion is that better economic status of the students of BFPS helped them in various ways in achieving more competencies in the test.

## **TEACHERS' AND THEIR RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

The head office (HO) level management of various types of BRAC schools claimed that teacher recruitment process as well as the quality of the teachers was mostly similar all over the country. It might vary sometimes in respect to area or school if adequate number of qualified teacher was not available. They strongly mentioned that no discrimination was done in teacher recruitment in respect to type of school. Such claim was not supported by the regional managers and the programme organizers. It was known that relatively better persons (in respect to educational qualification and smartness) were selected to teach in the formal and community schools compared to BPS. In principle, there is no difference in terms of qualification level or the remuneration package of the teachers of three types of school. An earlier study showed a different scenario in terms of teachers' quality. It showed that over 52% of the BFPS teachers had completed at least higher secondary education (HSC); this was 31% for the BCS and 13.7% for the BPS teachers. The average years of schooling was also varied by school type. It was 10 years for BPS, 10.7 years for BCS and 11.6 years for BFPS (Nath *et al.* 2005). Remuneration package was found similar in all three types of schools.

The respective regional manager, area manager and the programme organizer all had to be present during recruitment of teachers for community and formal schools, but it was not mandatory for the regional managers to be present in recruitment of the teachers for BPS. Some of the programme organizers opined that they did not always get qualified teachers as they wanted for the BRAC primary schools. Where there were community or formal schools along with BPS in an area, qualified persons were found interested in formal or community schools, not in the BPSs. Working in a permanent school was more prestigious than working in a temporary set up to some of them. Some of the teachers claimed that they did not see any difference in teacher recruitment process in BRAC; however, they opined that there might have variation in quality of teachers by type of school.

Location of the schools was another factor for differential educational qualification of the teachers. BRAC formal and community schools were located in better places than that of the BRAC primary schools. The BRAC primary schools were mostly located in the remote areas where scarcity of qualified teacher was a reality. The respondents in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions opined that educationally qualified teachers are required to have quality education. According to three of the four AMs, the relationship between teachers' educational qualification and students learning achievement is always positive. On the other hand, one of the area managers mentioned in an in-depth interview that "In general, teachers' educational qualification is a factor for students' academic performance, but it is not always true. Teaching and learning are two different issues. A good learner might not be a good teacher or vice versa." One of the teachers of a formal school said, "Educational qualification of teachers' is important for quality education, but we can not ignore classroom experiences of teachers for effective teaching." The area managers also said that there was scarcity of qualified teachers in all three types of BRAC schools, but the degree of scarcity was not equal in all the cases. It was serious in BPS, less serious in BCS and least serious in BFPS.

There was only one teacher in each BRAC primary school, but 4-5 teachers in other two types of schools. The programme organizer met a teacher of BPS once a week or sometimes once a fortnight. Thus, the teachers of BPS were unable to discuss their difficulties on time;



they had to wait till the PO comes. On the other hand, the teachers in other two types of schools discussed such issues among themselves as and when necessary. We have visited a formal primary school where there were five teachers – one of them had Bachelor degree and the others with higher secondary certificate. The former one, who was junior in age compared to others, often helped her colleagues as per their need. One day we saw that she was solving some problems through discussing with two other colleagues. When we discussed the issue with the other teachers they also said that due to more number of teachers in the school they can help each other without waiting for the programme organizer. They did not hesitate to take help from their junior colleagues. Such a collegial atmosphere is really impressive and appreciable.

One area manager was not ready to take the connotation that the teachers' educational qualification was the only factor in better learning achievement of the students of BRAC formal primary schools. According to her, better teaching depends on a wide range of issues such as teaching aids, delivery system, presentation skills, teachers' skills and confidence on the contents, and overall environment of school, etc. She added that the BFPSs were somehow in a better position in these contexts. Otherwise, a high school educated PO claimed that it is not necessary to appoint educated persons as teachers. Persons with lower level of education can also be made good teachers through proper training. However, he could not explain the reason of BPS students' lower performance than others.

Some of the respondents mentioned that it is really difficult for a teacher to teach all the subjects of all grades. If someone has difficulty with a particular subject her students might be affected at this. Such a situation might be tackled if there were more teachers in BPS. They claimed that the community and the formal schools have lesser chance to face such problems.

In conclusion, it can be said that teachers' educational qualification was responsible for differential performance of the students. A lower qualified person can also be a good teacher if adequate training is provided. Schools with more than one teacher have less chance to face problems like teachers' inadequate skills and competencies. As the BCS and BFPS were more equipped with qualified, experienced and trained teachers than BPS, the students of these schools did well than those of BPS.

## **ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION SYSTEM**

Some area managers and programme organizers pointed out that the assessment and examination systems in BRAC schools were not similar. For instance, there was no annual examination in BPS; everyday classroom assessment and short tests after 2/3 months played major role in students' assessment in these schools. On the other hand, along with the above, annual examinations were also taken in BRAC community and formal schools. Thus, the students of these schools were supposed to carry all the contents they were taught during the years up to the final examination, which was not the case for the students of BPS. As the duration of test we took was over two hours, the students of BPS, unused to such tests, might have lost concentration and did not do well. This was a time bound test, which again the BPS students were unfamiliar with.

One of the POs of a BRAC formal school and a teacher of BPS raised the issue of different seating arrangement in two systems. According to them, it was really difficult for the BPS students to write for over two hours seating on a mat, which they do not do during usual class time. However, they were used to seat on mat during their class time. They claimed that during RED's test the students of BPS became bored or felt uneasy after some time, which might reflect in their results. When the issue of seating arrangement was discussed with others they (a RM, an AM, and two POs) did not agree with this argument. Note that the seating

provision in BPS and BFPS was similar – on mat, but it was benches in the BCS. This means that seating provision was not a factor for differential performance.

In conclusion, it can be said that due to unfamiliarity with the type of test taken and duration of it, the students of BPS might do less well than others. One argument regarding this can be to pay more attention to the environment within which tests are taken. Alternatively, these students of BPS are supposed to move to the formal secondary schools after completion of primary education in BRAC schools. The formal secondary schools follow the assessment system followed in BFPS and BCS. This means that the BPS students lack some skills regarding assessment procedure. It is more meaningful to introduce the provision of annual exam in BPS along with the current practices.

## **TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS**

Teaching learning process of any school plays significant role in determining overall learning achievement of its students. In general, it includes teachers' preparation and use of lesson plan, use of blackboard and other teaching aids in the classrooms, relationship between students and teachers and among students, teachers' remedial actions for slow learners, overall environment of school, etc. Overall teaching learning provisions of various types of BRAC schools were in general better compared to other schools in the areas. Limited amount of classroom observation did not show much variation in this regard among three types of BRAC schools.

As was seen in the classroom observations and also stated by the programme organizers that giving home tasks to the students was a common practice in BRAC formal schools. This was less prominent in the community schools and the least in BPS. This has a link with the difference in socioeconomic status of the households and educational status of the parents of three groups of students. Poorer as well as less educated parents of BPS were unable to provide support at home regarding preparation of home tasks. It was observed that the teachers of BRAC formal schools checked the tasks of the students very carefully. As home task was a regular activity of the students they rarely missed it and the teachers also gave enough time in correcting the mistakes of the students. Such a practice helped students' improvement. The community school teachers often gave home tasks but did not give adequate attention to checking the tasks. Not much home tasks were given to the students of BPS. The reason behind this is the presence of more first generation learners in these schools. Some of the students of BPS during FGD with them mentioned that they sometimes failed to do home tasks due to lack of time at home, because they were supposed to help their parents after school hour. The affect of this is that the students of community schools and BPS did not practice their lessons at home as much as their counterparts of BRAC formal schools, which was reflected in their achievement results.

Preparing lesson plan was a must for any teacher in BRAC schools. Of the six classrooms observed only two (one BPS and another formal) were found with lesson plan. The respective POs and the teachers explained that the teachers who did not prepare the lesson plan were very experienced and thus knew how to run a class without such plan. Teachers in BRAC schools knew very well that asking students to write lessons on the blackboards has impact on their confidence building. During classroom observation we saw that except the formal schools others showed their negligence in this. However, the respective POs did not agree with this. As one of them said, "During my supervision, I always found my teachers calling the students to the blackboards for writing." We did not see any practice of punishment during our visit to the schools or classroom observations. When the issue was discussed with the teachers they said that they never punish their students, but if they could do it some of the weakest students, they might be better than what they are now. On the other hand, some students reported that they were sometimes punished by their teachers. As the students reported, their teachers used stick, scale or hands to beat them.

After school remedial classes for the weak students or the first generation learners was known to be a general norm in any BRAC school. It was surprising to see that no such arrangement was there in the BRAC primary schools under study. On the other hand, the community and the formal schools had remedial classes for the weak students. Teachers of BPS were supposed to check whether their students study in groups in the afternoon or in the evening. The teachers informed that they knew about the benefit of group study but it was not always possible for them to monitor it. The POs said that they sometimes checked it.

Teaching learning provision in the BRAC formal schools was relatively better compared to other two types of schools. In addition, the formal school students study at home due to the demand of their schools. It was again possible because of higher level of parental education and households' economic strength. Moreover, the limited remedial measures taken for the slow learners of BPS were not adequate for them to perform well.

### **TEXTBOOKS AND CONTACT HOUR**

Textbooks and contact hours are two important factors for students' quality learning. However, these were not similar in all three types of BRAC schools. NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) prepared textbooks were used in all the five classes of BRAC formal and community schools. On the other hand, full set of BRAC prepared textbooks were used in first three grades of BPS. In grade IV, half of the textbooks were BRAC prepared and half NCTB prepared, and in grade V full set of textbooks were NCTB prepared. The lengths of BRAC prepared textbooks were also shorter than those of NCTB. There is a history behind this. BPSs were introduced for the poorer children of rural areas as second chance of primary education. It was necessary to look at the circumstances where the curriculum would be applied at the time of its development. The following paragraph from Lovell and Fatema (1989) can give us a sense of BPS curriculum.

The initial step in curriculum development was to gather information about the targeted learners, their families, economic conditions, perceptions, levels of cognitive development, psychological and physiological growth. The formal schools in the rural areas, their curriculum, their relation to the community and the reasons they were succeeding or not were carefully studied.....The overarching objectives of the curriculum are to help the children to achieve basic literacy, numeracy and social awareness.

What ever the case was, the ultimate was the contents that the students of BPS went through during the primary cycle were shorter than that of the students of other two types of schools. Again the area managers, programme organizers and the teachers mentioned that the BRAC prepared textbooks were not only shorter in length than the NCTB textbooks, but easier too. However, they claimed that the national competencies were reflected in both the textbooks. It is to be noted that similar kind of supplementary books were used in all three types of BRAC schools.

The total contact hours in BRAC primary schools are also shorter than that in other two types of schools. The students of BRAC formal and community schools got one year pre-primary and five years primary, totalling six years of education before sitting for the competency test. Like any other formal school, BRAC formal and community schools starts in January and ends in December. On the other hand, there was no scope for the BPS students to get pre-primary education. According to an agreement of BRAC with the government, BRAC pre-primary students would essentially be enrolled in the government and registered primary schools but BRAC formal and community school students get pre primary education at the premises of their schools. Again, five years curriculum is completed in the BPS within four calendar years. Some of these schools got lesser duration than officially set, because of late

start. For instance, one of our study schools got 44 months to complete five years primary curriculum.

When the issues were discussed with the area managers, programme organizers and the teachers, they were found concerned about the matters. A teacher of a community school said that the provision of pre-primary was very effective for students' preparation for primary education. On the other hand, a teacher of BPS said, "I often face difficulty in completing the syllabus with a shorter duration of four years." The other one added, "The decision of shortening the syllabus comes from our head office. Our authority rearranges the syllabus almost every year cutting some of the contents." This means that the students of BPS completed their primary education keeping the textbooks incomplete, which might have reflected in their result in competency test. We came to know that the teachers of BPS did not face much difficulty with the BRAC prepared textbooks because these were not too heavy to complete within 9-10 months. Shortcutting exercise mainly occurs for the NCTB prepared textbooks in class IV and V. The teachers of BPS claimed that they were unable to complete the syllabus taking extra classes after official school hour. According to an area manager, extra classes are harmful for the students; they loose concentration when they are asked to continue study after four hours of official school time. The programme organizers and the area managers were found agreeing with the teachers regarding shortening of syllabus and its consecutive affect on students learning.

Before seating for the competency test, the students of BPS got two years less study time compared to their peers in community and formal schools. BRAC primary schools had to shorten their syllabus especially in class IV and V, which was not the case for others. Attempt of the BPSs to overcome this through taking extra classes did not gave any fruitful result, at least to make them equal with the others.

### **SCHOOL LOCATION, SUPERVISION AND VISIT**

BRAC formal and community schools were too small in number compared to BPS. All the formal schools were located nearer to the BRAC Training and Resource Centres (BTARC). Other two types of schools were located in any place where the demand for primary education was there. They sometimes faced natural calamity like floods, etc. which disturbed study for few weeks every year. It is to be noted that the formal and the community schools were built in permanent places and the BPSs in temporary places (see Box 1 for elaboration).

The POs responsible to supervise a formal or a community school also look after 5-6 BPS. Thus, they have to move in 6-7 locations to do their job. On the other hand, the POs looking after only BPS take responsibility of 12-13 schools located in such number of places. Thus, the possibility of supervision by the immediate supervisor was more in the formal and community schools compared to BPS. However, we do not know whether the performance BPSs under the former group of POs was better compared to the later group. There were 35 BPSs and one formal school in one area. According to the respective area manager, "It is not possible for me to see all the BPSs even once a month, but I visit the formal school at least once a week. I do it because it is possible." Frequent transfer of the POs responsible for BPS was another problem, which was not the case for other two types of schools. New POs took some time to be familiar with the situation and thus, did not get adequate time to provide quality supervision as they were transferred to new places soon. Regarding POs frequent transfer the RM and AMs said that generally educationally qualified and smatter POs were given the charge of the BFPS and BCS. It was not necessary to transfer them frequently owing to their good performance. On the other hand, due to dropout of the POs and lack of skills majority of the POs of BRAC education programme were to transfer from one place to another. This ultimate affect of such frequent transfer fell on BPS.

Because of their suitable locations the formal schools attracted various types of visitors (the head office managers, regional managers and the outsiders) more compared to the community schools and BPSs. The trainees of some training courses of the BTARCs also visited these schools as part of their training. The teachers of these schools and the respective POs were also aware of this. This made them serious in work and hence impacted on the students' performance. The teachers always kept them and their pupils prepared for any visitor. According to a teacher of a formal school, "We always keep our students up to date. If any of them fails to respond correctly to the questions asked by any visitor it's a grate shame for us." The respective AM added, "It helps us keeping standard of education." The PO standing beside nodded his head positively. These schools were more decorative than the other schools. Such a situation can only be compared with the State owned model primary schools in the *upazilas*.

### **PRIVATE SUPPLEMENTARY TUTORING**

At the national level, incidence of private supplementary tutoring at primary level is increasing over time and it has become a norm (Nath 2006). However, the incidence of this was much lower among BRAC school students compared to the national average. Of the three types of BRAC schools, it was the highest in formal schools, lower in the community schools and least in BPS. This was mainly because of the economic strength of the concerned households. As already mentioned that the students of BPS came from relatively lower economic status and thus their parents were unable to afford private supplementary tutors. These parents were not able to see their students' education at home due to lack of education of them. A father of a student of a community school mentioned as follows.

I don't have any separate space for my child to study at home. I was happy to see that the school was taking responsibility of group learning in a nearer house. It went well with much enthusiasm of my daughter. After about three weeks the initiative stopped. I have no other alternative for supplementary tutoring. I am unable to provide private tutor.

A RM, some AMs and POs also agreed about the necessity of private supplementary tutoring for quality education. They also knew that the students of BPS were unable to avail private tutor like as the students of BRAC formal schools. In one BPS we asked all 30 students whether they had any on payment tutorial support after official school hour. None of them had a positive answer. Besides, they added that none of them had electricity facility at home, so they were unable to study in the evening.

### **OTHER FACTORS**

According to a head office level manager the dropout of the students in BPS was higher than that of the community and formal schools. However, the POs did not agree with this. No information on this was available to BEP MIS. The dropout students were replaced by after six months of starting the schools thus they lack six months lessons. These students ultimately affect lowering the overall performance of BPS. Teacher dropout was also higher in BPS compared to other two types of schools. The new teachers often start taking classes without a basic training. It took some time for both the teachers and the students to be familiar with each other. This also hampered education in BPS.

Some other issues like parental care, class size, girl-boy ratio, electricity facility in school, basic, subject based and refreshers training, marital status of teachers and the POs, gender, etc. were discussed with the AMs, POs and the teacher. No influence of these factors in differential performance was mentioned by them.

The above discussion indicated some factors those were responsible for lower performance of the students of BRAC primary schools. Table 1 summarizes these factors for all three types of schools. Of the 20 factors mentioned 18 affected BPS, seven BCS and two BFPS.

**Table 1. Factors which were responsible for lower students' performance**

Factors	BPS	BCS	BFPS
Poor economic condition of the pupils	√	√	X
Flexible teacher recruitment process	√	X	X
Lower educational qualification of the teachers	√	X	X
No final examination based on whole book	√	X	X
Unfamiliar with paper-pencil based examination	√	X	X
Uncomfortable sitting arrangement	√	X	√
Checking of home-task is not done properly	√	√	X
Contents of the textbooks were easier	√	X	X
No scope to get help from others at home	√	X	X
Few incidence of private supplementary tutor	√	√	X
Location of school not suitable	X	√	X
Less contact hour for students	√	X	X
The whole range of syllabus kept unfinished	√	X	X
Supervision and visiting was not much	√	√	X
POs did not get scope to work with HO professionals	√	X	X
Frequent change of POs	√	X	X
Location of schools was far from one to another under a PO	√	X	X
Overall environment was not favourable for schooling	√	√	X
Disabled students	√	X	X
Teachers had no guidebook for social studies	X	√	√

## GENDER DIFFERENCE

Although the boys showed better performance than the girls in all three types of schools, the difference was higher in BPS compared to the others. There were many reasons for it. The first one lies with the system itself. Combining all the primary schools, the national level studies showed that the proportion of girls was mostly equal to that of the boys (Nath *et al.* 2005, Ahmed *et al.* 2005). Thus, an equal proportion of boys and girls were left out for BRAC to recruit in its schools. Again, there was no reason that their average level of cognitive development would be different. However, there must be difference in both the groups (boys and girls) in terms of individual cognitive skills. Thus, when BRAC selected children for BPS there was less choice for the girls than that of the boys to the selected for admission. This is because BRAC schools emphasised on girls' education. About two thirds of the pupils are girls in the BPSs. From a social value point this is a necessary cost. In order to follow this, BPS is to consider almost all the girls for admission and a section of the boys. The boys with relatively better cognitive skills got priority in admission. As a result, at the entry level a difference between the boys and the girls occurred, which might be continued up to the end of class V or the system could not do anything in equating this. This argument was supported by an RM and some of the POs during interview and focus group discussions. Although the other two types of schools tried to maintain similar sex ratio, in reality 55% of their pupils were girls. There is a chance that quality of boys was already higher than that of the girls at the recruitment stage.

Some of the informants including the teachers and the POs, however, blamed the social norms including the parents. According to them, the parents were not prepared to create enough space for education of their girls as they did for their boys. The POs added from their experiences that the parents involved mostly the girls in work at home but not the boys. According to them, some of the parents think that the education that the girls get in schools is enough for them and they do not need to study at home. They (the girls) should learn some other things (they meant household work) at home. Although the POs claimed that they tried their best to ask the parents to be equal in their treatment to their boys and girls, but it did not work well. Talking with the parents we also found that they emphasised more on boys' education rather than girls'. One of the mothers said, "Investment in boys' education is profitable for future security." It seemed to us that children's work was necessary for feeding in some of the households.

## **DISABILITY**

Inclusion of students with various abilities in a single classroom was a recent phenomenon. According to BRAC policy each school should have 10% of their students with various abilities. Discussing the issue with various stakeholders of BRAC schools it was known that they were very much aware about inclusive education. They understood the importance of inclusive education for overall development of the society. Some of the respondents mentioned that as the issue was a new one, they probably did not know how to deal with it but they were trying to provide education to all types of students in a classroom. According to an area manager, it was not an easy task for them because the society in general has a norm to exclude the disabled children from various activities including education; and again, the concept was not demonstrated in the majority of the schools. Adding to this, a PO said that there are various types of disabilities; dealing with various types of disabilities was another problem to the teachers. The area manager also said that as she saw the teachers can easily handle the physically disabled students, but faced difficulty with the mentally disabled students.

Some of the programme organizers opined that the families did not try as much for education of the disabled students. They mentioned two barriers for this – lack of awareness and training of the parents. Some of the parents were found happy to see their disabled sons and daughters in the schools with other children, which they never thought would happen. Some of the teachers observed lack of self-confidence of the disabled students, which they believe would increase over time owing to their activities in the schools.

Saying all the above, the teachers and the POs told that as the issue was a new one the disabled students did not do well like as the other students. But they believe that given the right atmosphere the disabled students can perform equally. Intention of the POs was strong enough and encouraging. Our classroom observations suggest that the teachers needed to be more careful to the students of various abilities if they really want to ensure equity in learning achievement. Teachers care include understanding the needs of the disabled pupils, asking the other pupils to behave friendly with them, including them more in classroom process i.e., asking questions, group activities, making group leader, etc.

## **SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT DIFFERENCE**

There were six subjects in the achievement test. These are Bangla, English, mathematics, social studies, general science and religious studies. In terms of mean number of items correctly answered, the formal school students did better than others in all the six areas, but the community school students did equally well in mathematics. On the other hand, in terms of achieving all the competencies BPS showed best performance in social studies and the formal schools in all other areas. When the issue was discussed with the teachers, POs and the AMs, no clear response was found from them. However, some of their comments were as follows:

- Teachers of formal schools were in general better than those of other schools, so their students did well in most of the subjects.
- Formal school teachers knew better English than other teachers.
- Formal school students took private supplementary tutoring in English.
- BPS teachers followed social studies guidebook properly.

It was also known that the head office management asked to give emphasis on various subjects at various times. The schools followed the instructions of head office. The instructions were sent based on internal monitoring exercise.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

A study on the students of three types of BRAC schools completing primary education in 2004 showed that the BRAC formal schools with only 11 in number had the best learning achievement of the students followed by BRAC community and BRAC primary schools. The number of community school was also small, only 44 and the BRAC primary schools was huge in number (32,000). Although the aims and objectives of education in all three types of schools were similar to those of the national aims and objectives of primary education, these three types of schools were not created with equal wealth and provision. They bear some major structural and educational variations which led in differential performance of the students. The following paragraphs summarises the reasons behind the difference.

The community and the formal schools were built in permanent structures. The formal schools were built by BRAC nearer to its training centres. Thus, they were well situated in terms of road communications. The community schools were built by the government with help from the communities and later handed over to BRAC. On the other hand, the BRAC primary schools were temporarily made and located in remote rural villages. In terms of economic strength of the households and parental education, the students of BPS were poorer than the others. The students of BRAC formal schools came from relatively better-off households. Many of them had better atmosphere for study at home and private supplementary tutors.

In the formal and community schools five cohort of students took lessons at a time, thus the number of teachers and students were more in these schools compared to BPSs. The BRAC primary schools had one teacher, single classroom and 33 students. The teachers were benefited from each other in former two types of schools, which was not possible in BPSs. The teachers of BPSs had to wait for the respective POs for any consultation, who visit the schools once a fortnight. Educational qualifications of the teachers of formal schools were also better than that of the other two types of schools. Although teacher preparation process was the same for all three types of schools, better educational qualification helped the formal school teachers more to perform well than others.

The formal schools got more supervision than the other schools. Officials from BRAC head office, trainees of various courses from the BTARCs and other visitors often visited these schools. Thus, the formal schools always kept them ready for demonstration. This was not the case for most of the community and BRAC primary schools.

A wide variation of contact hours existed among the schools. The students of community and formal schools got one year pre-primary and five years of primary, totalling six years of education before sitting for the competency test. On the other hand, the students of BPS got only four years for the same. There was no provision of the BPS students to go through the pre-



primary course of BRAC due to an understanding between BRAC and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. This is an injustice to the students of BPS. Such a wide difference in contact hour (one is one and half time higher than other) can easily create difference in students' performance.

The BRAC schools did not get similar kind of textbooks. The formal and community schools got the full set of primary textbooks prepared by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board plus BRAC prepared pre-primary and other supplementary books. On the other hand, the students of BRAC primary schools got an abridged version of textbooks in some classes. All the BPS students also received supplementary books but did not get the pre-primary course. Shorter duration of course (four years) did not allow them to complete the full length of textbooks they were given. Thus, the BPS students received fewer amounts of contents than the students of other two types of school, which led to lower performance. However, we do not know how much of the contents each of them could complete during the course of study.

The above summary findings clearly show that a number of favourable conditions that existed in the formal schools of BRAC ultimately created a strong correlation with the better learning achievement of its students. Alternatively, absence of these favourable conditions lowered the performance of BRAC primary schools. Let us now look back at the differences in the performances of the school types. Actually there was no statistically significant difference between average number of competencies achieved by BPS and community schools. On average, the students of later type of school achieved only 0.3 competencies more than those of former type. This means that although the community schools were ahead of BPS in various terms they could not do much better than BPS in achievement test. Again, with all the favourable conditions mentioned above, the students of formal schools achieved only two more competencies than the students of other two types of school. How can this be justified? Equating the support provided to the schools and conditions created with the learning achievement of the pupils it seems that the students of BPS and its teachers could add more value than others with their limited wealth. Here a basic question comes. When the children come to school, to which they actually come – to the school building, to the field, to the bell or to the teacher? The most appropriate answer might be the teacher. An interactive combination of the students and the teachers can create better learning, which probably occurred in the BRAC primary schools. Now the question comes, are we satisfied with this value added performance of the BPS system along with relatively lower performance of the pupils (2% points)? If the answer is yes, we are keeping ourselves happy considering that these rural poor children would lag behind their counterparts even they all belong under broader umbrella of BRAC. If the answer is no, we should think the way of increasing the level of competencies of the students of BPS. What would happen, if four elements of the formal schools, for instance pre-primary course, one more year of primary education, introduction of annual exam and full set of NCTB textbooks could be added to the BPS initiative? An attempt may be taken to test this hypothesis.

In order to test the above hypothesis, active cooperation between the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and BRAC is needed. BRAC needs to be ready to extend BPS from four years to five years and introduce annual exam. The ministry should provide all textbooks to all students of BRAC primary schools as the government is committed to its free textbook policy at primary level. The ministry should also allow the BRAC pre-primary school students to enrol in BRAC primary schools. A randomised experimental design on a number of schools can give us the most plausible answer.

Alternatively, provision of additional tutoring after official school hour can be introduced in the schools so that the pupils can learn better. Frequent transfer of the POs should be stopped so that they can get enough time to understand the communities well and work with the schools

for longer period. Emphasis on understanding the concepts along with the contents should be an important part in monthly refreshers training session.

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